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ABSTRACT

This document is one of eight in a series of guides designed to help teach and counsel troubled youth. It differs from the others in the series in that it was written specifically for children who are struggling with serious family problems such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness. The first of the 20 lessons in the guide helps students to understand that there are no perfect, problem-free families and that all families have at least minor problems. Lesson 2 notes that serious family problems are faced by many youth and are not shameful, isolated occurrences. Lesson 3 emphasizes that serious family problems such as violence, alcoholism, and sexual abuse are never caused by children; lesson 4 acknowledges that such problems cannot be solved by children. Lessons 5 and 6 help students learn to help themselves and to resist enabling (rescuing) behaviors. Lesson 7 stresses that there is help available for serious family problems; lesson 8 focuses on family secrets. Lessons 9, 10 and 11 explicitly detail and explore sexual abuse and incest. Other lessons focus on alcoholism and addiction, physical and verbal abuse, neglect, divorce, and emotional problems. Some lessons help students to balance their own needs with those of their families, to work out rather than act out serious family problems, and to seek and accept help to manage serious family problems. The final lesson focuses on every child's basic human rights. (NB)

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A Child's Guide to Surviving in a Troubled Family

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Ruth Herman Wells, M.S.
Illustrated by Daniel C. Wells

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Coping Skills

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Author's Note:

This book comes with a "warning label".

This is the tenth book I've written, and by far, the most difficult to write. It is based on thousands of hours with abuse victims, children of alcoholics, troubled families, and the teachers and counselors who work with them. This book is one of the few resources that offers candid, in depth, detailed help for children to address the very painful and private family issues that can be the central concerns of their young lives.

Talking about alcoholism, drug abuse and incest is never easy. That is why so often it is not talked about at all. But these problems exist with startling frequency. When we avoid talking about these subjects, we leave children to cope alone with terrible trauma. The child is first victimized in the family, and then victimized again by youth professionals who do not want to see it, certainly not talk about it.

Here is the cautionary information:

This is a book for children who are struggling with serious family problems such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence and mental illness. This is not a book for children from safe, non-abusive, relatively functional families. This book is primarily meant to be used by mental health workers with children from severely troubled families, although many of the lessons could be used in a general educational, preventative or informational manner by non-clinicians such as teachers.

In this book, are lessons on incest and child sexual abuse. These lessons are not intended for young children. They are designed for youth who may be experiencing, or at high risk of, child sexual abuse. Some of the items in the lessons on sexual abuse are quite explicit and may not be appropriate for use with your population. If that is the case, either modify the materials or do not use them. This is a good guideline to use for all of the lessons.

For those of us who have struggled for years to assist the 1 in 3 girls who are sexually abused, to cope with the overwhelming trauma of that abuse, the lessons on sexual abuse are intended to be the new tools we have needed to help these victims recognize, identify and give a name to what has happened to them. These lessons, although candid and detailed, are meant to help lessen the shame, self-blame and self-hatred young victims often feel when their family's problem seems to be too terrible to even talk about or look at. By identifying and picturing the problem, these lessons may help the smallest victims of sexual abuse to stop blaming themselves for a problem so terrible that it seems to have no public name or clear image. Perhaps, in your hands, these lessons will mean that fewer children will continue to suffer and endure sexual assault alone.

This book was intended to be respectful of family integrity and family values. The lessons in this book should be used with that in mind, and only after all appropriate family, community and administrative approvals have been obtained. The book is based on the premise that all families are doing the best they can, and that all parents want the very best for their kids. However, this book had to be written, because despite our efforts to be the best parents we can, too many of us have been sidetracked by drugs, alcohol, poverty and more.

This book is for the children from deeply troubled families. Please use these lessons with their safety and future in mind. My hope is that perhaps fewer kids will suffer alone.

RHW

Lesson 1

All Families Have Some Problems Sometimes

Goal: To introduce students to the concept that all families have at least minor problems, and many families have moderate and/or major problems; to show students that there are no "perfect" problem-free families, and that having problems is normal.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. ▲ **Inform** the students that they will be learning more about families, especially about the challenges families face, and how these challenges can best be managed. **Ask** the group to develop a list of problems that families may face, and **ensure** that the students include a wide range of concerns from minor problems (such as "occasionally burn dinner") through serious ones (such as "dad hits mom".) **Write** the students' responses on the board.

▲ **Ask** the students to order the problems by seriousness, from minor to major. **Re-write** the problems on the board from minor to major, as directed by the students. The list should appear similar to the sample shown below:

Minor Problems

Porch Light Still Burned Out

Occasionally Oversleep

Forgot to Mow Lawn Twice This Summer

Medium Problems

Yell At My Sister

Repeatedly Break Curfew

Have to Cut Down on Spending

Major Problems

Mom is Often Drunk

My Sister Ran Away Again

Dad Often Hits People

2. ▲ **Ask** the students to determine if some families can avoid ALL problems, including all the concerns shown on the list. **Assist** the students to determine that all families have to cope with at least minor problems, and that no family is always

problem-free. **Write** on the board and **discuss** with the class: *All families have some problems sometimes.*

3. ▲ **Ask** the students to discuss how people often view minor family problems as compared with moderate or major ones. **Assist** the students to determine that people are often embarrassed or ashamed to disclose moderate or major family problems, then **discuss** this issue with the class. **Assist** the students to understand that many youth live in families facing moderate and major problems, but many of these youth may believe that they are the only one who could face such a terrible problem. **Ask** the class members to identify which problems may be perceived as especially embarrassing or hard to discuss. As appropriate, **include** the following: substance abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse and mental illness.

▲ **Write** on the board, and **discuss**: *Many families have problems that can seem more serious or embarrassing than anyone else's, but the truth is that many families face your family's problems. There is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. Your problem is shared by others.*

4. ▲ **Review** the major points of this lesson:

- All families have problems they must cope with, even if they are just minor concerns.

- Some moderate or major problems can be viewed as embarrassing or shameful, and some youth may believe that no one else faces their problems.

- Many families face the same difficult challenges. Family problems are seldom one-of-a-kind; they usually happen in many other families.

- Facing problems with substance abuse, mental illness, verbal abuse, physical abuse or sexual abuse is not shameful. Many young people face these concerns.

Lesson 2

Nobody Else But Me...Has Problems Like These

Goal: To teach students that serious family problems are faced by many youth, and that these problems are not shameful, isolated occurrences, but expectable problems shared by many youngsters in our society.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of "Who Has Problems Like These?" handout, one copy for each student of "Who Normally Feels Shame for Problem Behavior?" handout, pens.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning more about family challenges. **Discuss** with the class that youth often believe that major family problems are shameful and embarrassing, and faced by no one else. **Ask** the group to identify family problems that may be viewed in this manner, and **assist** the group to include physical abuse, verbal abuse, mental illness, sexual abuse and substance abuse.

2. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be investigating the frequency of major family problems, attempting to determine if these concerns are isolated, rare events or predictable occurrences faced by many families. **Distribute** the "Who Has Problems Like These?" handout to the students. **Review** the handout with the class, **clarifying** the meaning of any unfamiliar terms, then **assist** the students to complete the form. **Discuss** the completed forms with the class, **assisting** the students to conclude that major family problems are not isolated occurrences, but regular concerns faced by many families.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to consider if serious family problems are really shameful. **Define** shame as *feeling pain or guilt about improper conduct*, or use a comparable definition developed by the class. **Assist** the students to discuss who normally feels shame for problem conduct by completing the "Who Normally Feels Shame for Problem Behavior?" handout. **Discuss** the completed forms with the class members, **assisting** the students to determine that the person who behaves problematically is usually the one who normally feels shame and remorse for their conduct. **Write** on the board, and **discuss:** *The person with the*

problem behavior normally is the one to feel shame about his/her actions.

▲ Assist the students to discover that when a family member has problematic conduct, such as alcoholism, the offspring are often the ones who feel shame, even though they are not the ones performing the problematic behavior. **Discuss** with the class that children from families facing problems, do not need to carry shame over the conduct of other family members-- shame is normally felt by the person who used problem behavior. **Write** on the board, and **discuss:** *A child of a family with serious problems may feel shame about the problems, even though shame is normally felt by the person who engages in the problematic actions. Family members who simply witness the behavior but are not performing the actions, have nothing to be ashamed about.*

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

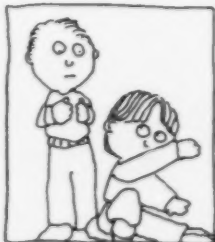
- Children from families that have problems such as physical abuse, verbal abuse, mental illness, sexual abuse and substance abuse, often view these concerns as shameful, one-of-a-kind concerns unique to their families.

- Major family problems not isolated occurrences, but regular concerns faced by many families. During the early 1990's, many experts estimated that 15% of the children in the U.S. were from homes troubled by substance abuse; 15% of families struggled with mental illness; 20% had problems with physical and/or verbal abuse; and 35% had problems with sexual abuse.

- Shame can be described as "feeling pain or guilt about improper conduct". It is not the bystanders, but the person who has problem behaviors, who normally feels shame about his/her actions.

- Children from families with serious problems may feel shame about the family's problems, even though shame is normally felt by the person who engages in the problematic actions. Family members who witness problems, but are not performing the behaviors, have nothing to be ashamed about.

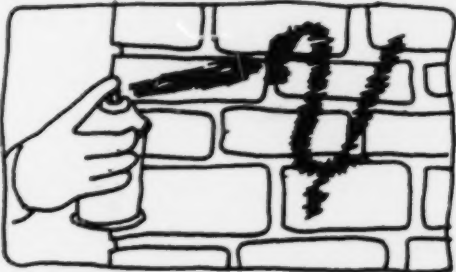
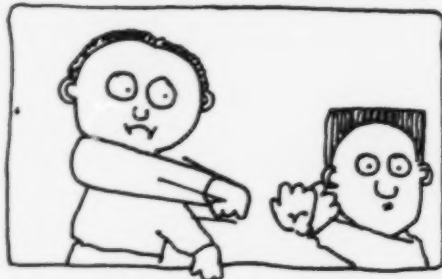
Who Has Problems Like These?

PROBLEM	ESTIMATED RATE OF OCCURENCE	ARE YOU REALLY THE ONLY ONE?
<i>Family Substance Abuse</i> 	15%	☐ Yes ☐ No
<i>Family Mental Illness</i> 	15%	☐ Yes ☐ No
<i>Physical or Verbal Abuse</i> 	20%	☐ Yes ☐ No
<i>Sexual Abuse</i> 	35%	☐ Yes ☐ No

These numbers are from 1992, and show the percentage of kids believed to be facing each of the problem areas shown

Who Normally Feels Shame for Problem Behavior?

Identify the person who normally feels shame about problem behavior by writing the person's name or description next to the picture.



Lesson 3

Family Problems Are Never Your Fault

Goal: To teach students that serious family problems such as violence, alcoholism and sexual abuse, are never caused by children.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of "Can Children Really Cause Serious Family Problems?" and "What Really Does Cause Serious Family Problems?" handouts, pens.

1. ▲ **Inform** the students that they will be learning about the real causes of serious family problems. **Distribute** the "Can Children Really Cause Serious Family Problems?" handout, and **ask** the students to identify if the children in the vignettes really cause the serious family problems that are described. **Assist** the class members to determine that children can not cause serious family problems such as violence, sexual or physical abuse. **Write** on the board and **discuss** with the class: *Children can never cause serious family problems such as violence, substance abuse or divorce.*

2. ▲ **Ask** the students to again review the handout vignettes by identifying the blaming statements that are used in the handout. **Ask** the students to circle all the blaming statements included in the vignettes and to **discuss** whether these statements are accurate. **Assist** the students to identify additional blaming statements they have heard such as "I never had a drinking problem until you were around" or "The only time your Dad and I

fight is about you." **Assist** the students to determine that it is common for angry family members to make blaming statements during fights or times of stress, but these statements may not be accurate, and may be said in anger and not really reflect the true viewpoint of that family member.

3. ▲ **Ask** the students to consider what can contribute to the development of family problems. **Distribute** the "What Really Does Cause Serious Family Problems?" handout and **ask** the class members to complete the forms. **Discuss** the completed handouts with the students, **assisting** them to recognize that environmental and internal forces cause family problems, but children don't. **Write** on the board, and **discuss**: *Environmental and internal forces cause serious family problems; children don't.*

4. ▲ **Review** the major points of this lesson:
● Children can never cause serious family problems such as violence, substance abuse or divorce.

● It is common for angry family members to make blaming statements during family fights or when under stress, but these statements may not be accurate, and may not really reflect the true viewpoint of that family member.

● Environmental and internal forces cause serious family problems; children don't.

Can Children Really Cause Serious Family Problems?

Read each of the vignettes shown below, then determine if the child could really be the cause of the serious family problem that is described.

When Jose arrived home from school, he could tell that Dad had been drinking for a long time. "Hey, Dad," Jose said softly, "I thought you were going to lay off that stuff." Dad wheeled around quickly in his chair. "Maybe if I didn't have such busybody children, I would of stayed off. I got tired of all the pressure you all put on me. Those sad eyes and tired looks you give. That's why I had to drink."

Soon-Yi raced up the apartment stairs. Mom always yelled loudest when Soon-Yi was really late. Soon-Yi tore open the apartment door and raced in, ready to apologize. "Why you little..." Soon-Yi heard as the door opened wide. Her ears burned as Mom took a swing at Soon-Yi's face and cursed her loudly. "You little brat," Mom yelled, "You're two hours late again. I know I shouldn't hit you so hard, but you're so late, I got so mad, I had to do it. It's all your fault for not being here on time."

Mom was on the phone to Dad. They had always fought a lot but since they had decided to get the divorce, the fighting had become much worse. LaTonya had tried to be a good student, keep curfew and follow the rules, but nothing she did, had made a difference. The divorce was still going to happen. Once in a big fight, Dad had said that it was the kids that had caused a lot of the problems, so LaTonya had really struggled to be as perfect as she could, but it must not have been good enough, she thought to herself, because they're still getting divorced and they're still fighting.

Sarah now always wore trousers and baggy sweaters. "It must have been that short skirt I wore. And I shouldn't have left my bedroom door unlocked," Sarah thought to herself. She was still scared that her step-father might try to touch her again in a way that felt really wrong to her. "I just should never have worn that mini-skirt," Sarah thought to herself again. "This whole mess is totally my fault. He's right when he said that I should have kept covered up and locked my door all the time. I'm never going to stay alone in the house with him."

Mom's moods changed all the time. One minute she could be smiling and friendly, but the next second, it was as though the sky had darkened and the clouds came in. Mom could change from smiling to crying without anything even happening-- it was really scary. It was really bad on days she forgot her medicine. Those were the days when she cried the most, and sometimes she said she cried because us kids upset her.

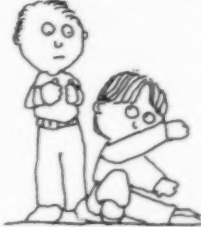
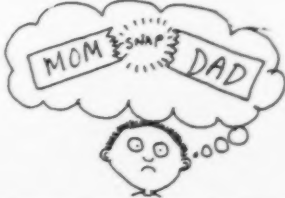
Sometimes Mom and Dad fought long into the night. It was impossible to sleep with all the yelling and crashing that went on, but Dianne knew better than to go out there. She could occasionally understand the words they were saying. She knew sometimes they argued about her grades, the clothes she wore, even her friends. Some nights, Dianne would cry softly into her pillow. On these nights, Dianne was sure that the fights were all her fault.

"I need you to drive me around tonight, Ramone," Dad was saying. Ramone knew that meant that he was supposed to chauffeur Dad from bar to bar because Dad was already too tipsy to drive himself. "But, Dad, I have a chemistry exam tomorrow", Ramone protested softly. "Just bring a flashlight and study in the car," Dad commanded, "I won't be very long tonight, I promise." Reluctantly, Ramone took the car keys and unlocked the car doors. "I really blew it bad," Ramone thought to himself. "He'll get blasted again tonight, then come home and hit me and Mom. I should have stood up to him better. Now when he hits her, it will be all my fault."

"Oh, no! She found it," Raylene thought to herself, "I really messed up. I should have stayed home from school and been sure she stayed out of those pills. It is completely my fault that this happened."

What Really Does Cause Serious Family Problems?

Identify which items really do cause serious family problems. Add in additional items in the blank spaces provided.

Substance Abuse 	☐ Addiction, physical craving ☐ Stress, distress ☐ Genetics, heredity ☐ Social pressure to drink ☐ _____ ☐ _____
Sexual Abuse 	☐ Poor self-control and judgement ☐ History of sexual abuse ☐ Problems with social functioning ☐ Problems with emotional functioning ☐ _____ ☐ _____
Mental Illness 	☐ Genetics, heredity ☐ Stress, distress ☐ Problems coping ☐ Medical problems ☐ _____ ☐ _____
Verbal and Physical Abuse 	☐ Poor anger and impulse control ☐ History of abuse ☐ Poor parenting/child care skills ☐ Stress, distress ☐ _____ ☐ _____
Divorce 	☐ Irreconcilable differences ☐ Inability to maintain warm regard ☐ Social, cultural, financial pressures ☐ Frequent fighting, disagreements ☐ _____ ☐ _____

Lesson 4

Children Can Never Fix Serious Family Problems

Goal: To teach students that serious family problems such as violence, alcoholism and sexual abuse, can not be solved by children.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of "What or Who Can Best Solve Serious Family Problems?", pens.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about the solutions to serious family problems. **Ask** the students to identify household repair problems that routinely occur in family homes. **Elicit** answers such as "the car won't start" and "the oven won't work". **List** the students' responses in a column on the board, then **ask** the students to identify who or what could best solve the household repair problem. **Elicit** answers such as "a plumber", "Dad" or "a mechanic", and **list** the students' responses in a second column on the board as shown in the sample below:

Household Repair	Who Could Best Solve the Problem?
Car won't start	Dad Mechanic Uncle Bob
Faucet leaks badly	Plumber Mom Apartment Manager

Assist the students to review the completed list and to determine that usually adults who have years of experience, education, or expertise managing or servicing households, will normally be most effective people to take the problem-solving role on routine household repair problems.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to consider who often takes the responsibility for solving or managing serious family problems such as substance abuse or violence. **Assist** the class to identify that often the children attempt to fix or manage serious family

problems, and **elicit** comments such as "I have to keep Mom from driving when drunk" or "I have to be sure that Dad doesn't get mad and hit". **Ask** the class to discuss if children are somehow better prepared to solve serious family problems than household repairs. **Assist** the students to determine that youngsters will often be ineffective managing both household repairs and serious family concerns.

3. **▲ Distribute** the "What or Who Can Best Solve Serious Family Problems?" handout and **review** the directions with the class, then **ask** the students to complete the form. **Review** the completed forms with the class, **emphasizing** the following points that are suggested by the handout:

- People are most likely to make changes themselves; others cannot do this for them.

- Adults such as counselors and religious leaders with experience, education, expertise and the mission of problem-solving, are best qualified to help resolve serious family problems.

- Children who do not have the experience, education, expertise or life mission of solving serious family problems, are unlikely to be able to resolve serious concerns in their family.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Children may feel that they are responsible to fix or manage serious family problems. They may believe that "I have to keep Mom from driving when drunk" or "I have to be sure that Dad doesn't get mad and hit."

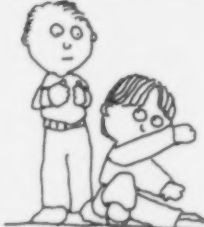
- People are most likely to make changes themselves; others cannot do this for them.

- Adults such as counselors and religious leaders with experience, education, expertise and the mission of problem-solving, are best qualified to help resolve serious family problems.

- Children who do not have the experience, education, expertise or a life mission of solving serious family problems, are unlikely to be able to resolve serious concerns in their family.

What or Who Can Best Solve Serious Family Problems?

Number each item in each section to show how effectively that person or entity can solve serious family problems. Place an X by any item that is not an effective way to solve serious family problems. Add additional items in the blank spaces, and rate them. Remember: effective problem-solvers have experience, expertise and education helping families modify serious family problems.

Substance Abuse 	<u>2</u> The addict/alcoholic goes to a counselor <u>1</u> The addict/alcoholic enters a treatment center <u>3</u> The addict/alcoholic joins a 12 Step group <u>X</u> A son or daughter hides the liquor <u>X</u> Wife asks alcoholic to stop drinking <u>4</u> Gets an A.A. sponsor
Sexual Abuse 	— The police — A child protection agency — The abuser seeks counseling — The victim wears more layers of clothes — _____ — _____
Mental Illness 	— A doctor or hospital — A son or daughter excels in school — Taking medication regularly as directed — A counselor or social worker — _____ — _____
Verbal and Physical Abuse 	— A son who works to keep family members from getting mad — Family therapy — A parenting class — Police or child protection agency — _____ — _____
Divorce 	— A marriage counselor — A daughter who works to prevent fights from starting — A mediator — A religious leader — _____ — _____

Lesson 5

To Best Help Your Family, Help You

Goal: To teach students who want to "save" their families from serious family problems, that they can best help their families by best helping themselves.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about how they can best help their families cope with serious family problems. **Ask** the students to identify actions youngsters might take to help their families cope with serious family problems such as divorce, substance abuse and violence. **Elicit** answers such as "Stay home from school to keep Mom from taking pills". **List** the students' responses in a column on the board, as shown in the sample below, then **ask** the class members to identify the impact of these actions on the youngster:

Action Taken to Solve Serious Family Problems	Helps or Hurts ME?	Effective Ways to Solve Serious Family Problems	Helps or Hurts ME?
Skip school to keep Mom from drinking	Hurts me	Mom goes to AA	Helps me

Assist the students to determine that when children attempt to solve serious family problems, they often do so at great cost to themselves.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to reconsider the list of actions shown on the board, and identify methods that offer more effective ways to manage such problems, for example, a more effective way to manage Mom's drinking problem might be for Mom to go to a counselor. **Write** in a third column on the board, these effective strategies, then **ask** the students to determine if these effective strategies help or hurt the children. **Write** these responses in a fourth column, as shown in the sample. **Assist** the students to recognize that the most effective approaches to solving serious family problems do not hurt the offspring.

3. **▲ Discuss** with the class that often families do not pursue the most effective help available, and

acknowledge that for many families, seeking effective help is unlikely. **Ask** the students to consider and discuss the following points:

- If a family will not seek effective problem-solving help, will that make the help offered by the children any more effective? (*No, children can not take the place of a doctor, counselor or treatment center.*)

- If a family will not seek effective help, is it the responsibility of the children to provide help instead? (*No, fixing or managing serious family problems is an adult responsibility.*)

- I don't mind the costs of helping my family manage their problems. (*You are not really helping your family when you miss school to moderate parental drug abuse. You are being hurt by not having the chance to put your needs as your first concern.*)

- If I want to help my family and not hurt me, but they won't take outside help. What do I do? (*What works best is to live in as healthy a way as possible given your family situation, and show your parents and siblings that there are ways out of the problems. With a good education, a support system and self-care skills, you may be the family member to break out of the poverty, drug use, abuse or violence. Otherwise, you are likely to continue the family problems and pass them on to any children that come into your future.*)

- If I don't help, the problems could get much worse. (*Rescuing someone from the natural consequences of their actions is called "enabling." Enabling often slows people from seeking help because every time you "save" them, they avoid "hitting bottom" and feeling the consequences.*)

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- When children attempt to solve serious family problems, they often do so at great cost to themselves.

- Some families are unlikely to seek effective help, but it is still never the children's responsibility to improvise needed help; this help will not solve the problems.

- To help your family, you must help you and put your needs first so you will be equipped to not continue the problems.

- Enabling keeps people from "hitting bottom" and often delays them from seeking help.

Lesson 6

Enabling Seldom Helps and Often Hurts

Goal: To teach students who want to "save" their families from serious family problems, that they often prolong the problems and hurt themselves when they enable.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about how to tell if the help they provide to address serious family problems is helping or hurting. **Define** enabling as rescuing a person from the natural consequences of their actions. **Read and discuss** the following examples of enabling, **focusing** on how enabling is not fixing.

● *I called Mom's work and lied to her boss. I said she was sick again. Truth is she was hung over again from the weekend. I thought she'd stay home and sleep it off. I couldn't believe it. All she did was start drinking at noon instead of her usual after dinner time. Worse, she made me stay home and take care of her. Then I ended up lying to the school, to my step-dad, to Grandma and my friends about why I stayed home. I help her clean up one mess, and right away she's starting another.*

● *I covered up for what Dad did. I never told even Mom or my sisters about how he had touched me in a way that I hated. He said he'd get in trouble. Today, I find out that he's started with both of my little sisters. I keep wondering if I'd told someone what he did, if he would have ever had dared touch them.*

● *I always made Dad real mad. I figured that I could take it, but the little kids-- I wasn't sure they could. I even stopped playing basketball at night because he was hitting more and harder. I didn't want the little kids to go through that. So I stayed home and took flak for 'em. Sure, I lied about it-- we all did. I always figured I'd just keep him mad at me and off the other ones. Well, it didn't work. Instead, he seemed to start thinking that since I won't tell and I don't die, he can just do whatever he wants to us, and nothing bad will ever happen. Now, I'm real worried he's gonna kill someone and I have no idea what to do about it.*

2. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss the following assessment of enabling made by one girl who grew up in a family that was secretly physically, sexually and verbally abusive: *Enabling is a lot*

like plugging a hole in a big dam. It temporarily solves the problem, but soon a new leak will spring, then another, then another. You're always plugging leaks but nothing is ever fixed.

▲ Ask the students to reconsider the three scenarios of enabling that were read earlier, and to rate the effectiveness of enabling in each of the situations. **Assist** the students to rewrite each scenario by replacing the enabling actions with responses that place the child first and also hold each family member accountable for their own behavior. **Discuss** the re-written scenarios and **assist** the students to evaluate the effectiveness of enabling vs. the child putting their own needs first, **assisting** them to determine that enabling is usually ineffective.

3. **▲ Discuss** with the class that there are no "right" ways to handle complex and difficult family problems like sexual abuse, violence, and substance use, but they may wish to consider the following pointers as guidelines they can use to select their course of action:

● Avoid enabling: rescuing seldom helps and often hurts.

● Consider what would be the best course of action for YOU.

● Can you get help and support from other family members, your religious group, a self-help group, a counselor or teacher?

● What actions would help you stay safe and sane?

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

● Enabling is the term used to describe rescuing a person from the natural consequences of their actions.

● Enabling can provide just brief relief from problems, but in the long run, enabling seldom solves problems and usually makes existing problems worse.

● There are no simple or easy answers to serious family problems. Here are guidelines to help formulate your course of action: avoid enabling, figure out the best course of action for YOU, seek help and support, and select actions that will help you stay safe and sane.

Lesson 7

There is Light at the End of the Tunnel

Goal: To show students who are coping with serious family problems, that there is relief, hope and help available, and that they are not alone.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of the "Big Problem Survival Guide", pens.

1. ▲ **Inform** the students that they will be examining how children may feel when their family is challenged by serious family problems. **Ask** the class members to identify how a children may feel when their family struggles with serious issues such as violence, poverty or abuse. **Write** the students' responses on the board, and **discuss**. **Include** responses such as "lonely", "scared" and "hopeless", and **assist** the class to determine that these are normal responses to serious family problems.

2. ▲ **Draw** on the board a chart that approximates the "Big Problem Survival Guide" as shown in the sample below, then **assist** the students to fill in

the chart with their suggestions on how to manage their thoughts and actions as they manage their feelings during problem times.

3. ▲ **Distribute** the pens and the copies of the "Big Problem Survival Guide", and **ask** the students to fill in the form, using their own ideas or those listed on the board. **Direct** the students to fill in their own problem feeling in the final, blank square and to write in a caption and complete all other blanks. **Assist** the students to complete their forms and to **discuss** their results with the group. **Include** in the discussion, how students could rely on their completed forms for help when faced with serious problems.

4. ▲ **Review** the major points of this lesson:

- It is normal to feel scared, lonely or hopeless from time to time, especially if you are facing serious family problems.

- You can help yourself to manage serious problems by learning to best manage your thoughts and actions.

When I Feel...	I Can Think About...	I Can Do...
Lonely		
Hopeless		
Scared		
Angry		
I'm the Only One with My Problem		

Big Problem Survival Guide

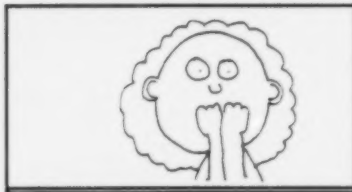
When I Feel...



LONELY



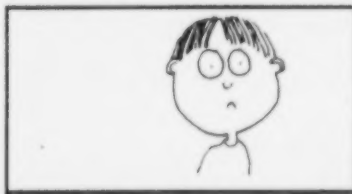
HOPELESS



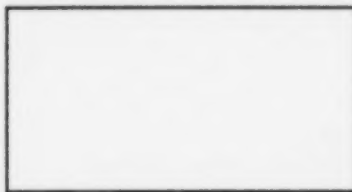
SCARED



ANGRY



**I'M THE ONLY ONE
WITH MY PROBLEM**



...I Can Think About

This feeling won't last forever
It's normal to feel this way
I can survive how I am feeling

Time is moving
I can survive this
It is normal to feel this way

I can find help and stay safe
I am getting stronger
This will be over soon

It's normal to feel anger
I have the right to feel anger
I can accept my frustration

Others have survived my problem
I am not alone with this problem
My problem is not unusual

...I Can Do

Find support people
Call, write or visit people
Get to know yourself

Stay busy and active
Talk to someone
Focus on future hopes

Get needed help
Coach yourself
Guess what to expect

Punch a pillow
Exercise
Yell into a pillow

Talk to someone
Go to a self-help group
Plan to get help

Lesson 8

Understanding Family Secrets

Goal: To help students learn more about family secrets, and to assist students to identify and understand the options they have to cope with serious, hidden family problems such as sexual abuse and alcoholism.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be examining "family secrets." **Define** family secrets as serious problems that the family members are aware of, but would never disclose or discuss with people outside the family unit. **Ask** the class members to identify problems that can become family secrets, and **elicit** answers such as alcoholism, physical abuse and eating disorders.

2. **▲ Discuss** with the students why serious family problems often become family secrets. **Elicit** answers such as "don't want to risk splitting up the family" or "don't want to get Dad in trouble." **Discuss** that while the reasons offered for keeping serious family secrets are understandable, sometimes the secrets are of concern because they leave children unsafe and without the help they need to cope.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to rate the effectiveness of keeping problems secret by identifying the likely results of hiding the following concerns:

- You think that you have a sinus infection
- Your car brakes may not be working right
- Your roof is starting to leak
- You are having difficulty seeing clearly enough to read or drive

● You don't have a warm coat and a bitter cold storm is expected

● There is nothing left to eat in the refrigerator

● You have an overdue traffic ticket that will cost \$10 more each day until you contact the court

Assist the students to conclude that hiding problems is usually ineffective, and often will worsen the situation. **Assist** the students to apply this conclusion to serious family secrets, such as incest, violence and substance abuse, and to identify potential sources of help with family problems, such as clergy, counselors, etc.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

● Family secrets can be defined as serious problems, such as violence, sexual abuse or alcoholism, that family members are aware of, but would never disclose or discuss with people outside the family unit.

● Serious family problems often become family secrets because children don't want to risk splitting up the family, or get a parent "in trouble." While these reasons are understandable, it is also important that children be kept safe and have all the help they need to cope with serious family problems.

● Hiding problems is usually ineffective, whether the problem be as common as faulty brakes on your car, or alcoholism in your family. Problems left unsolved often get much worse. Family members, counselors and clergy people are often able to help you stay safe and begin to resolve the serious family problems you've kept secret.

Lesson 9

But, I'm Too Scared to Talk About Sexual Abuse

Note: This lesson explicitly details and explores sex abuse for sex abuse victims, and those at risk. It is recommended that this lesson be implemented with same-gender students. Care should be taken to ensure that this lesson is appropriate for your setting. It should be modified as needed to fit your students, and your community/family values. This lesson is intended for use by mental health workers; all others should consider seeking mental health consultation prior to implementation.

Goal: To help students who have been sexually abused, and others, including those who are at risk, to identify sex abuse, and develop positive ways to prevent and manage it.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, a rag doll, pens, one copy for each student of "What is Child Sexual Abuse?" and the Help Resources List (a list of phone numbers of: child protection agencies, police, rape help lines, crisis lines, runaway shelters, self-help groups, etc.)

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about child sexual abuse. **Define** child sex abuse as physical contact by an adult, peer or older child with a child when that contact involves inappropriate touching, especially the touching of areas of the body that are covered by a bathing suit. **Using** the rag doll, **identify** the areas of the body most likely to be involved in sexual abuse, and label these areas "private parts", or **use** more specific terms, as appropriate. **Discuss** that the private parts are normally not extensively contacted by other people, although parents and doctors may occasionally need to briefly assist in hygiene or health tasks in these areas. **Include** in the definition of child sexual abuse, incidents when the child witnesses sexual activity, or is subjected to graphic sexual comments. **Provide** additional information to define sex abuse as needed and appropriate. **Indicate** to the class that this can be a difficult and troubling area to discuss, but that it's even more difficult and troubling to experience, especially without information, help and support.

2. **▲ Distribute** the pens and the "What is Child Sexual Abuse?" handout, and **discuss, modifying** any items that require adjustments to effectively

depict sexual abuse to your population.

▲ Offer the class the following statement on how they can best guard against sexual abuse; if necessary, **modify** the statement to best fit your students, and if desired, **note** that parents and doctors may occasionally have to touch **personal** parts to perform brief health/hygiene chores: *You are the boss of your body. You have the right to select which types of touching you will permit and which you will not. Everyone must respect your decisions.*

3. **▲ Ask** the students to identify how children often cope with sex abuse and **include** the following items in the discussion:

- **Keep it secret:** *This cuts you off from help.*
- **Forget what happened:** *As many as 30-60% of young sex abuse victims forget. If you think you've been abused, but have little/no memory of it, you may have forgotten. Many times, the memories return when you are an adult.*
- **Run away:** *There are programs that can help you get away from the abuse without running away.*
- **Pretend it never happened:** *Pretending will not stop the abuse from happening to you or others.*
- **Protect yourself:** *Hiding, locking your door and dressing unattractively will not ensure safety.*
- **Act out your problems:** *Being angry or withdrawn won't end abuse, nor will drugs/alcohol.*

▲ Discuss with the students that seeking adult help from clergy, counselors, teachers or family is the best action. **Distribute** the phone help lists, and **ask** the students to suggest additional resources. **Discuss** how you can help students.

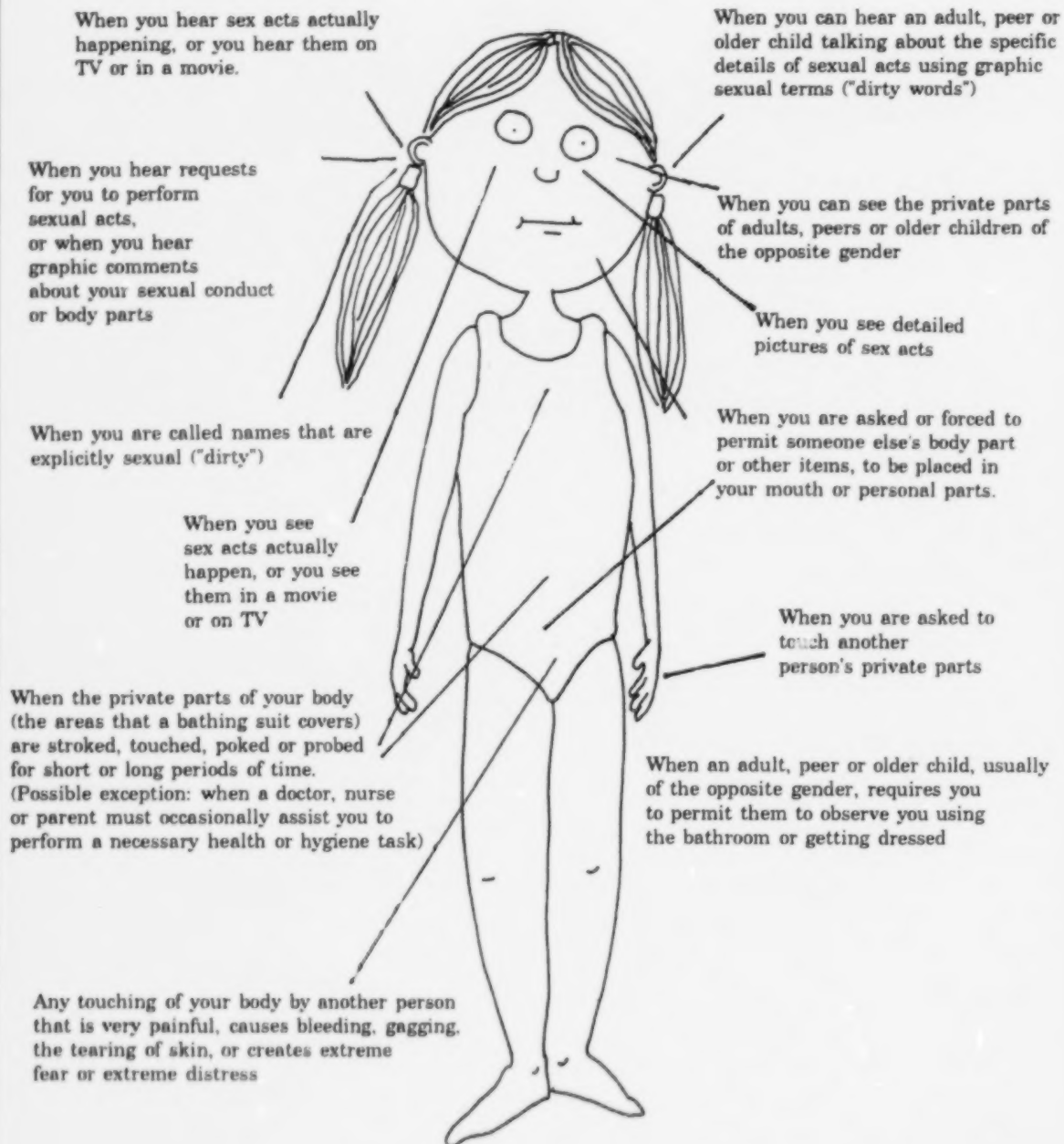
4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- **Sex abuse happens when there is inappropriate physical contact with a child, or the child witnesses sexual activity or comments.**
- **You are the boss of your body, and you have the right to select which types of touching you will permit. All adults must respect this.**
- **If you think you may have been abused, tell a family member, counselor, clergy person, teacher or principal, and keep telling until you are safe.**

What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

It is difficult to show you exactly what child sexual abuse looks like. Even though it hard to show you, to help you know it if you encounter it, here is one picture of it based on the input of sexual abuse victims. If you think you have been sexually abused, or if you aren't sure, be sure to tell a family member, religious leader, counselor, teacher or principal...

And, keep telling, until someone hears you.



I'd Rather Not Even Think About Incest

Note: This lesson explicitly details and explores incest for incest victims. It is recommended that this lesson be implemented with same-gender students. Care should be taken to ensure that this lesson is appropriate for your setting, and that the instructor has obtained all needed approvals. The lesson should be modified as needed to fit your students, and your community/family values. Due to the subject matter, many students may have strong reactions. Because of this, this lesson is intended for use by qualified mental health workers who can skillfully assist youth to safely and thoroughly address any emotional issues that arise. Others should seek mental health consultation prior to implementation. Safety must be the top priority.

Goal: To help students who are incest victims, and others, to identify incest, and develop positive ways to prevent and manage it.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, rag dolls or anatomically correct dolls (optional), one copy for each student of the "Everything You Never Wanted to Know About Incest-- But May Really Need to Find Out" handout, pens, one copy for each student of a Help Resources List for incest victims and their families (include phone numbers for rape centers, family counseling programs, crisis lines, domestic violence shelters, runaway shelters, child protection agencies, counselors, police, clergy, and other support persons and resources for sexually abused children.)

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about a type of child sexual abuse called incest. **Define** incest as sexual contact between a child and an older child in the family, or between a child and an adult family member, or between a child and an adult who is in a position of power and trust within the family, such as a mother's boyfriend. **Discuss** that when adults/older children in the family expose a child to graphic sexual words, acts, or comments, or have the child view sex acts or adult private parts, this can be experienced by the child to be as damaging as incest because of the violation of the trust, safety and boundaries. **Discuss** that when a child is aware of incest in the family, it is often experienced to be nearly as

troubling as being the actual victim, because the child never knows if s/he may be the next victim. As necessary, and as appropriate to your students' age, **provide** additional information to explain incest; **use** several rag dolls or anatomically correct dolls to assist younger children. **Acknowledge** that discussing incest can be painful and uncomfortable, but that surviving incest alone and without understanding, is far more painful.

2. **▲ Inform** the students that incest is a common problem. **Write** on the board, and **review** the following estimated 1992 statistics for incest:

- More than 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be sexually abused.
- Experts believe that many more kids than we know about (as shown in the statistics above), are sexually abused. They believe that 35% of kids are sexually abused. That's 1 in 3 kids.
- About 80% of all sexually abused kids are incest victims. The vast majority of these victims are girls. The vast majority of their abusers are men.

Discuss with the class, that while incest is often kept secret, it is a very common problem. **Assist** the students to discuss why children hide incest, and **elicit** answers like "I thought no one would believe me" and "I thought it was my fault."

3. **▲ Distribute**, then **discuss** the "Everything You Never Wanted to Know About Incest-- But May Really Need to Find Out" handout to the students, and **review** with the group. (You may first wish to **edit** the list to best fit your group.)

▲ Discuss with the group that every child has the right to be safe. **Distribute** the phone resource lists and **discuss** how they can access help; **detail** how you can assist the class members to cope with sexual abuse issues.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:
 • Incest is sexual contact between a child and an older family member.

• Incest is a very common problem, especially for girls.

• Every child has the right to be safe. There are family members, clergy, counselors or teachers who can provide you with help.

Everything You Never Wanted to Know About Incest-- But May Really Need to Find Out

For many people, incest may be the single most uncomfortable and unwelcome topic that exists. But it does exist. In fact, it exists a whole lot more than most of us would like to imagine or even think about. We'd all prefer to imagine it could never happen to us, or to someone we know, or in our town or city. In reality, it could happen to anyone, especially if you're a girl. It is happening to a startling one-third (approximately) of the girls in the U.S. Although you may not want to know about it, you may need to. Because we don't like to talk about it, there is a lot of misinformation and ignorance about incest. Here are some of the real facts that you may need to understand and cope with incest.

Myth

Incest only happens in remote, rural areas.

Incest only happens in poor families, or to families of certain ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Incest is never committed by people who are religious, are community leaders, or in "model families".

People would know if incest happened in our...town, family, school, neighborhood, etc.

Violence must often be involved in incest.

The victims really don't mind it.

Incest is usually just fantasy.

Incest doesn't do any lasting harm.

Incest is all or partly the victim's fault.

Fact

Incest happens in urban, suburban and rural areas.

Incest happens in poor and rich families, and to families of all races, religions and cultures.

Incest occurs in religious and non-religious homes, and in "model" or troubled families.

Even other family members in the same house may really not know that incest is happening.

Force is rarely needed by abusive parents who are loved, and trusted authorities who control food, shelter, etc. Sibling abusers and more distant relatives may use some force, threats or coercion.

Incest victims hate what is done to them. Sometimes, the body does what a body is supposed to do and experiences some pleasure. However, a moment of pleasure will not diminish the extreme anguish. The body may not understand, but the mind still does. Victims can often feel overwhelming agony and shame over any pleasure they experience.

It is truly rare for a child to make up a claim of incest. Usually, the details are too specific, and most youngsters will not otherwise have access to the detailed sexual information they possess.

Incest traumatizes most victims. Post-traumatic stress syndrome may occur in 30-60% of the young victims who may literally dissociate from the event and forget it. Often, as adults, memories return to haunt and devastate. Incest has been linked to eating disorders, behavior problems, and many serious mental health problems.

Incest is NEVER the child's fault. It is the adults' job to adequately protect children and teens.

What You Can Do About Sexual Abuse

Note: This lesson is designed for use with sex abuse victims, and those at risk. Because of the subject matter, be sure to obtain any needed approvals to use this lesson, and be sure, as needed, to adjust the lesson to fit your students and community. This lesson is primarily intended for use by mental health professionals; others may wish to seek mental health consultation prior to implementation to best ensure student safety.

Goal: To provide students who are sex abuse victims, or at risk of sexual abuse, information on how the abuse may affect them, and what they can do about it.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, phone books and directories that list counseling and crisis help resources for child sexual abuse victims.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about the impact of child sexual abuse, and how they can cope with sexual abuse. **Define** child sexual abuse as physical contact by an adult, peer or older child with a child when that contact involves inappropriate touching, especially the touching of areas of the body that are covered when a bathing suit is worn. **Discuss** that sexual abuse also occurs when a child witnesses sexual activity, or is subjected to graphic sexual comments. **Inform** the students that sexual abuse includes incest, which is the word used to describe sex abuse committed by a family member or person who is in a position of power and trust within the family, such as a mother's boyfriend. **Acknowledge** that discussing sexual abuse can be painful, but that surviving sexual abuse alone and without understanding, is far more painful.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to identify the most common problems that result from sexual abuse, and **write** their responses in a column on the board. **Elicit** answers such as "feel worthless" and "feel helpless." **Discuss** with the students that these reactions are normal and expectable.

▲ Ask the students to list ways to cope with each of the problems listed, and **write** their responses in a second column on the board, listing

each coping method across from the applicable problem. **Include** the following coping methods in the list: *self-help groups, counseling, reading about sex abuse, talking to other victims, talking to friends, talking to family members, talking to clergy, securing help to stay safe, and securing help to end current abuse.* **Stress** to the class, the importance of staying safe and seeking immediate help if faced with current sexual abuse by telling an adult and continuing to tell until helped.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss if the problems caused by sexual abuse are likely to go away or get better if ignored. **Ask** the students to guess what may likely happen to each of the problems listed on the board if the problem is not acknowledged and no help is arranged. **Assist** the class members to determine that the problems are likely to persist or worsen if left unaddressed, and that their own abuse issues are likely to persist or worsen if left unaddressed.

▲ Discuss with the students how they could access the help methods shown on the board. **Use** phone books and crisis and counseling community resource directories to show students where and how to reach help. **Discuss** how you can assist the students to address their sexual abuse issues.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Child sexual abuse is physical contact by an adult, peer or older child with a child when that contact involves inappropriate touching. Sexual abuse also occurs when a child witnesses sexual activity, or is subjected to graphic sexual comments. Incest is sex abuse committed by a family member.

- There is help and support available for you to address the problems that developed.

- The problems that develop from abuse issues are likely to persist or worsen if left unaddressed. These problems will not get better or go away if ignored.

- If you are currently coping with sex abuse, it is vital that you get help to become safe by telling an adult and continuing to tell until helped.

Lesson 12

There's an Alcoholic/Addict in Our Family

Goal: To assist students to better understand and cope with parental alcoholism and addiction.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, pens, phone books and directories that list counseling and crisis help resources for children of alcoholics/addicts.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about alcoholism and addiction. Define alcoholism/addiction as: *the chronic, habitual and/or excessive use of substances such as drugs and alcohol, especially if the usage directly or indirectly results in negative social, emotional or family problems for the user, or those nearby; denial of the problem by the user, is often part of the alcoholism/addiction.* Discuss this definition with the class, but do not permit students to "water down" or narrow the scope of the definition.

▲ Ask the students to describe people who fit the definition of alcoholic/addict, and assist the students to recognize that alcoholics/addicts are often not the stereotypical, homeless "bums" that many people envision, but they can be almost anyone in any family, occupation, race, community or economic group.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to identify the most common problems that result from having an alcoholic/addicted parent, and write their responses in a column on the board. Elicit answers such as "unexpected blowups", "steals my money" and "have to take care of him." Discuss with the students that there are predictable consequences that children of alcoholics/addicts often face, and assist the students to discuss the feelings that must result because of these consequences.

▲ Ask the students to list ways to cope with each of the problems listed, and write their responses in a second column on the board, listing each coping method across from the applicable problem. Include the following coping methods in the list: *self-help groups, counseling, reading about alcoholism/addiction, talking to*

other children of alcoholics/addicts, talking to friends, talking to family members, talking to clergy, and securing help to end any current physical, verbal or sexual abuse that may be occurring. Stress to the class, the importance of staying safe and seeking immediate help if faced with current abuse by telling an adult and continuing to tell until helped.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss if the problems caused by alcoholism/addiction are likely to go away or get better if ignored. Ask the students to guess what may likely happen to each of the problems listed on the board if the problem is not acknowledged and no help is arranged. Assist the class members to determine that the problems are likely to persist or worsen if left unaddressed, and that their own problems are likely to persist or worsen if left unaddressed.

▲ Discuss with the students how they could access the help methods shown on the board. Use phone books and crisis and counseling community resource directories to show students where and how to reach help. Discuss how you can assist the students to address the issues they face as a result of parental alcoholism/addiction.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Alcoholism/addiction is the chronic, habitual and/or excessive use of substances such as drugs and alcohol, especially if the usage directly or indirectly results in negative social, emotional or family problems for the user, or those nearby. Denial is often part of the alcoholism/addiction:

- An alcoholic/addict can be almost anyone in any family, occupation, race, community or economic group.

- Children of alcoholics/addicts often face a predictable set of problems as a result of their parent's addiction.

- The problems caused by alcoholism/addiction do not get better if ignored. It is important to seek help especially if you are in danger.

What to Do About Physical and Verbal Abuse

Goal: To assist students to better understand and cope with physical and verbal abuse by parents.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about physical and verbal abuse. **Assist** the class to develop a definition of physical and verbal abuse based on the standards of your community. Be sure to **include** in the definition that serious physical and verbal abuse is physically and emotionally harmful to the child. **Assist** the students to best understand what constitutes physical and verbal abuse by drawing a scale on the board, as shown below, then **ask** the class to determine where different types of verbal and physical contact such as spanking, slapping, whipping, etc. should be placed on the continuum. **Emphasize** that there are no "right" answers to placing items on the continuum, that the point of the exercise is only to clearly show which parental actions are abusive because they cause pervasive physical or emotional harm to the child.

▲ Ask the students to discuss the impact of serious physical or verbal abuse on children, and **elicit** comments such as "low self-esteem", "afraid" and "angry".

2. **▲ Ask** the students to determine if parents have the right to seriously verbally or physically abuse their children. **Assist** the students to determine that parents do not have the right to seriously harm their child physically or emotionally. **Acknowledge** that most parents may very occasionally say or do somewhat harmful things, but that help should be sought to cope with parents who use repeated or serious abusive behavior.

▲ Ask the students to consider how some children react to physical or verbal abuse, and **write** their responses in on the board. **Elicit** answers such as "hide", "pretend it didn't hurt", "call the police" or "tell no one". **Discuss** with the class, the effectiveness of each response, crossing out ineffective methods and circling effective ones. **Ask** the students to indicate the likely long term results of using the ineffective methods vs. the likely long term results of using effective methods. **Assist** the students to conclude that seeking help is the best way to ensure their safety and moderate the problems. **Stress** the importance of seeking help when in danger and detail how to contact the police, child protection agencies, counselors, teachers and others for needed help to stay safe.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss what happens to the anger that verbally and physically abused children have, and **assist** them to determine that the anger is often turned out towards others or inward towards the self. **Assist** the students to identify ways that abused children can vent their rage and avoid having their anger create additional problems. **Include** methods such as the following: *Tell someone how you feel, exercise, hit a pillow, yell into a pillow, talk to other kids who have the same problem, find adults who will listen, and tell yourself not to turn one problem into many.*

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Serious physical or verbal abuse can cause serious emotional and physical damage. Parents do not have the right to hurt their children in this manner.

- The anger that abused children feel often spills out at others or is turned inward. By venting your anger, you can avoid some of the additional problems with anger you may otherwise face.

- Seek help when in physical danger.



Sometimes Nobody Notices Me

Goal: To assist students to better recognize and understand neglect, and to better cope with, and manage it.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of information on local community resources to aid children (such as churches, day care, soup kitchens, shelters, recreation centers, self-help groups such as Al-A-Teen, libraries, playgrounds, social service agencies, latch-key programs, after school recreation opportunities, etc.)

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about neglect. **Assist** the class to develop a definition of neglect based on the standards of your community. Be sure to **include** in the definition your local laws that dictate at what age a child can be legally left alone unattended, and a focus on whether the child's needs for nurturing, supervision and care are being met.

▲ Ask the students to discuss the impact of neglect on children, and **elicit** responses such as "loneliness", "scared" and "hungry." **Acknowledge** that these are normal responses to neglect. **Assist** the students to understand why neglect occurs, and include the following factors: *both parents may have to work, child care may be too expensive, child care may be unavailable, there may be just one parent in the family, the parent may have multiple jobs, poverty, mental illness, family crises, family strife, substance abuse, and poor parenting skills.* **Assist** the students to recognize that no/few parents intend to be neglectful, but that many factors can lead to this result anyway.

2. **▲ Inform** the students they will consider ways that students can best cope with neglect. Using the community resource information, **assist** the class to determine how students can help themselves moderate or alleviate some of their concerns, such as loneliness, no heat, poor supervision, no food, no clothing, etc.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss how children can cope with the emotional effects of neglect, and **include** the following: *Remember it's not your fault, remember your parents love you but may have a hard time acting that way, talk about your feelings, consider becoming involved in religious or fraternal groups, seek out other family members, talk to others in the same situation, find a support network that can help care for you, learn good self-care skills, and find adults like counselors and teachers that you can go to for help.*

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Neglect can occur when children are left unattended, or when their needs for supervision, nurturing and care are not adequately met.

- Neglect can lead to feelings of loneliness, fear and anger, along with other emotions.

- Few parents intend to be neglectful, but they may be struggling with problems that result in neglect. Problems with unavailable child care, poverty, substance abuse and family crises are common causes of neglect.

- Your community may have resources to lessen the neglect. It is important to talk to a family member, religious leader, teacher or other adult about getting help if you think you may be neglected.

Lesson 15

Nobody Asked Me if I Wanted a Divorce

Goal: To assist students who are troubled by a divorce in the family, to better understand and accept the divorce.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about divorce. **Ask** the students to share their feelings and reactions to divorce, **permitting** them to share personal concerns. **Discuss** with the students that it is quite normal to have strong, negative feelings about a divorce in the family.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to identify causes of divorce, and **elicit** responses such as "constant fighting" and "a lot of hitting and screaming." **Write** the responses on the board, then **discuss**. **Assist** the students to note that divorce is usually the result of serious, long term problems and is not a decision casually or lightly made by spouses.

▲ Ask the students to participate in a brief experiment that will help them understand how bad a troubled marriage can feel to the parent. **Ask** the students to each stand on just one foot without holding on to anything for support. After a minute or two, standing on one foot will become quite uncomfortable, and the students will find it impossible to stand or do almost any task. **Compare** this discomfort and inability to do anything to how a parent constantly feels when the

parent is in a deeply troubled marriage. **Emphasize** that just as it becomes increasingly vital to the each student to lower their raised foot, so it becomes increasingly important for the parent to terminate the failed marriage.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss the "downside" or drawbacks of divorce, **permitting** them to vent pent-up anger and resentment. **Ask** the students to determine if there are any improvements that divorce can bring, and **elicit** answers such as "no more hitting" and "now I can sleep through the night without any yelling." **Assist** the students to conclude that there are improvements and problems produced by divorce. **Discuss** with the students that they never have to like or agree with a divorce; they only need to accept it because they can't change it. **Assist** the students to discuss how children can accept disliked divorces.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- It is normal to initially have strong, negative feelings about a divorce in the family.

- Divorce is usually the result of serious, long term problems and is not a decision casually or lightly made by spouses.

- Divorce can produce some improvements and some problems. You never need to agree with or like a divorce; you simply have to accept it because you cannot change it.

Understanding Emotional Problems

Goal: To assist students to understand and cope with the emotional problems that can occur in families.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, be prepared with information on a variety of emotional problems, (if necessary, ask a mental health professional to assist with the class), information on community resources, support and information to offer children from families with mental illness.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about emotional problems. **Ask** the students to share what they know about emotional disturbances, and **correct** any misinformation that is offered.

2. **▲ Discuss** the following facts about mental illness with the class, then **discuss** with the class:

- *Many emotional problems such as depression, are caused at least in part by the body. The person does not "choose" the problem.*

- *Counseling and medication are the two most common ways that people can be helped with emotional problems.*

- *Many emotional problems may be hereditary, meaning that you may be at risk of having similar difficulties.*

- *Some common emotional problems include depression, phobias, addictions and eating disorders. There is nothing shameful about having these problems; these problems are the emotional equivalent of medical problems such as needing eye glasses or allergy shots. These emotional problems are primarily developed by the body, the mind and the events that happen in a person's life.*

- *Some emotional problems may require medication for the rest of the person's life; other emotional problems may also be a lifelong issue and may require behavior change, counseling or stays in a hospital or treatment center.*

- *Emotional problems are similar to physical problems in that no one "chooses" to have the*

problem, and sometimes there is no "cure", and on-going medicine or behavior change is needed.

- *Emotional problems can sometimes cause parents to seem distant, nasty, out of control, or preoccupied. Often, parents with emotional problems have two major jobs: being your parent and helping themselves. Sometimes, these are two very big jobs to manage.*

▲ Offer the students the chance to ask any questions they may have about specific kinds of mental illness, for example, a student may want to know why his brother is labeled "autistic", and what does that mean.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to discuss how a child in a family that is coping with mental illness, can best manage the concerns that can develop. **Assist** the students to identify concerns and solutions, and **write** these items on the board. **Elicit** concerns such as "my Mom's mood changes every ten seconds from excited to bummed out", and solutions such as "be ready for the mood changes when she forgets to take her medication." **Assist** the students to identify additional community resources that can provide support and information to children in families with mental illness.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- *Many emotional problems are caused at least in part by the body. The person does not "choose" the problem.*

- *Counseling and medication are the two most common ways that people can be helped with emotional problems.*

- *Parents with emotional problems have two major jobs: being your parent and helping themselves. Sometimes, these are two very big jobs to manage.*

- *Having a parent who has emotional problems can be challenging, but there are many resources that can help you discover the best solution to any concerns you may have.*

Balancing Your Needs with Those of the Family

Goal: To assist students to balance their own needs with those of their families.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk.

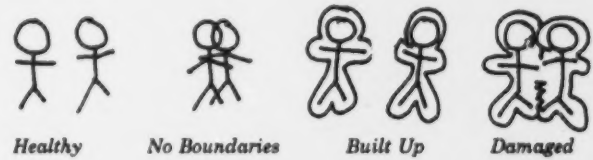
1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about balancing their own needs with those of the family. **Ask** the students to identify serious family problems and the responsibilities children may take to address these concerns. **Elicit** responses such as in an alcoholic home, the child may hide liquor from the alcoholic parent. **Write** these problems and responsibilities in two columns on the board, as identified by the students. **Review** the completed list with the class by asking the students to identify which family member is the person who is supposed to be in charge of each responsibility. For example, Dad is normally supposed to regulate his liquor usage. **Assist** the students to recognize that in seriously troubled homes, the children may often take on tasks that are normally adult responsibilities.

2. **▲ Ask** the students to consider the results of a child taking over parental responsibilities due to serious parental problems. **Ask** the students to consider the impact on the child of taking over parental problems, by considering what social, emotional or academic activities are affected when adult responsibilities are assumed. For example, a child stays home to regulate liquor intake. **Assist** the class to conclude that accepting parental responsibilities negatively impacts children.

▲ Ask the students to discuss the impact on the parent when a child assumes some of the adult's responsibilities. **Ask** the students to review the list on the board, and to determine if the child's intervention spares the adult from the negative consequences of their problematic actions, or leaves the adult facing the real-world consequences. **Assist** the students to determine that saving a family member from the consequences of problematic behaviors, deprives that person of the opportunity to learn from the consequences that would normally occur, and these consequences have the potential to stop or moderate the problem behavior. **Assist** the class to determine that saving family members from consequences, often

has negative impact on the family member.

3. **▲ Identify** to the students, that they have indicated that saving family members from the consequences of problem behaviors, hurts both the family member and the child. **Identify** saving as "enabling". **Inform** the students that they can moderate enabling behavior by learning to have good boundaries with their family. **Draw** the following types of boundaries on the board, as shown below, then **discuss** each type of boundary, as indicated below, **emphasizing** that healthy boundaries best aid people to have healthy relationships and avoid enabling.



• **Healthy boundaries:** It is clear where one family member starts, and another ends. Each person performs just his/her own role and is in charge of only his/her own actions, thoughts and feelings. The children tackle just children's tasks, and parents are responsible for parental tasks.

• **No boundaries:** It's hard to tell where you and the other family members start or end because your behaviors, feelings and actions are all entwined. Parents may abdicate some parental chores which the children may pick up. The family may seem chaotic, like nobody is in charge.

• **Built up boundaries:** There are walls around that no one can get past. Isolation is common, but the person feels safe from closeness that could hurt. People with built-up boundaries are often inflexible.

• **Damaged boundaries:** Boundaries are battered, missing and/or built up. Family members are entwined sometimes and isolated sometimes.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

• In troubled homes, children may take on adult responsibilities, but this often has negative impact on the child and parent.

• Healthy boundaries aid people to have healthier relationships and avoid enabling.

Work It Out Instead of Act It Out

Goal: To assist students to work out rather than act out serious family problems.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, art supplies (paper, markers, pens, scissors, glue, etc.)

1. ▲ **Inform** the students that they will be learning to work out rather than act out serious family problems. **Ask** the students to discuss how children may feel when they live with serious family problems such as alcoholism, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, etc. **Elicit** responses that are feelings such as "anger" and "rage". **Identify** to the class that living in a troubled family can produce many strong feelings in the children, and that this is a normal, expectable occurrence.

2. ▲ **Ask** the students to identify what happens to strong feelings, and **assist** the class to determine that strong feelings must be regularly vented in some manner. **Ask** the students to determine what happens to strong feelings that are not regularly vented, and **aid** them to determine that these feelings will burst out. **Use** one of the following analogies to describe this phenomena:

- *Strong feelings inside of you are like a pressure cooker. Unless vented regularly, the pressure cooker will explode.*

- *Strong feelings inside of you are like bits of trash piling up. Unless you vent and clean house regularly, pretty soon, things can get pretty smelly.*

▲ **Ask** the students to specify how they vent regularly, if they do, and how the feelings "blow up" or "burst out" if they don't. **Elicit** answers like "I end up yelling at the science teacher" or "I end up crumpling up my test paper 'cause I'm so totally frustrated from problems at home."

3. ▲ **Distribute** the art supplies to the class, and **ask** the students to draw on one side of the page, how they feel inside when the feelings are building up, and to draw on the other side of the page, how they would prefer to feel inside. **Discuss** the completed pictures with the group, or individually, as needed. **Assist** the students to identify that unplanned, socially inappropriate blow-ups hurt them by adding additional problems, and by keeping them from feeling the way they wish they could. **Aid** the students to identify ways to regularly vent pent-up feelings that will not cause additional problems, and will allow them to more often feel inside the way they would like. These methods could include some of the following: *Talking out the problem, talking to a friend or adult, remembering what I'm really mad about, exercise, drawing, poetry, hitting a pillow, yelling into a pillow, crying, writing down my feelings, writing down everything I'm mad at, going to a self-help group, counseling or taking a long walk.*

4. ▲ **Review** the major points of this lesson:

- **Living** in a troubled family can produce many strong feelings in the children, and that this is a normal, expectable occurrence.

- **Strong** feelings must come out one way or the other. Unless you regularly vent these feelings, they are likely to burst out of you in ways that can cause additional problems for you deal with.

- **By** identifying and using socially appropriate ways to regularly vent your feelings, you can avoid creating additional problems when you blow up, and you can move closer towards feeling the way you would like to feel inside.

Lesson 19

How to Find Help That Really Helps

Goal: To assist students to seek and accept help to manage serious family problems.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, phone books, community social service resource directories, art supplies (paper, pens, markers, etc.), photocopying machine (available for use after the class to reproduce the help directory that the class will produce.)

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about how to access help for serious family problems. **Ask** the students to identify the reasons people would or would not seek help with serious problems, and list their responses in two columns on the board. **Discuss** the reasons people would access help, and **assist** the students to conclude that without help, problems often don't get any better. **Discuss** the reasons people resist seeking help, and **assist** the students to acknowledge the legitimacy of these concerns, along with possible solutions to the concerns.

2. **▲ Distribute** the phone books and resource directories and **direct** the students to identify potential sources of help, and to determine alternative resources for sources that are labeled not helpful or somehow problematic. **Include** the following help resources: *counselors, social workers, child protective agencies, religious organizations, self-help groups, 12 Step meetings, fraternal organizations, youth service organizations*

and crisis services. **Assist** the students to select the "best" and most appropriate resources for children, and to organize them into a "Finding Help That Really Helps" Directory created by the students, that can be reproduced and distributed to the class members when completed.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to describe how children feel when they cope alone with serious family problems. **Assist** the students to transfer to paper, their responses about how hard it can be when children face serious family problems all alone. **Ask** the class to include this dialogue in their resource directory along with guidelines developed by them, to help children know when to seek help. **Inform** the class that they will all receive copies of the completed directory, including the resources, information on how difficult coping alone can be, and the guidelines for knowing how and when to seek help. **Ensure** that the guidelines and all other components of the guide are accurate, reflect your community laws and standards, and will be a safe and useful document for the students to use.

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- **Without help to cope with serious family problems, many times, the problems often don't get any better.**

- **Many concerns about accepting help to cope with serious family problems are quite legitimate, but many times, there are other resources for help that you can consider as alternatives.**

Every Child's Basic Human Rights

Note: Due to the complex emotional issues raised, this lesson should be used by mental health professionals, or in consultation with mental health professionals. The checklist can be expanded or edited to best fit your community's values, norms and laws.

Goal: To teach students from severely troubled families, their basic human rights, and to encourage abused students to seek help to ensure their safety even if they've experienced abuse many times before.

Materials: Chalkboard, chalk, one copy for each student of "Every Child's Basic Human Rights Checklist", pens, information on community help resources for children.

1. **▲ Inform** the students that they will be learning about how to tell if they are being abused. **Identify** to the students that it can seem difficult to determine what is abuse if the problem is longstanding. For example, a boy who is regularly hit and kicked may not consider it abuse because he's "used to it" or "he heals quickly." **Assist** the students to consider the following reasons children offer to excuse abuse; **assist** the class to debunk each excuse, and to add and debunk additional excuses:

- It happens all the time.
- He doesn't mean to do it.
- She promised it won't happen again.
- It doesn't hurt all that bad.
- I heal quickly.
- She feels bad about doing it.
- I don't want my family to get broken up by it.
- I don't consider it to be abuse.
- It would kill him if I told anyone.

2. **▲ Distribute** the "Every Child's Basic Human Rights Checklist" and pens to the class, then **review** the checklist with the students. **Assist** the students to each complete a form, then **discuss** the completed forms with the class **focusing** on how all children are entitled to have all of their basic human rights respected. **Allow** the students to

make reasonable additions or changes to the list to make the checklist best reflect your community's values, norms and laws. **Review** the help resources available to students, and **identify** how you can assist the class members who wish to moderate current abuse.

3. **▲ Ask** the students to consider why families have problems. **Assist** the students to determine that probably no parent wakes up each morning and says "Today, I'm going to be an awful parent and really hit that kid!", but that because of drugs, poverty, alcoholism, mental illness, etc; well-intentioned parents can slide into becoming abusive parents. **Discuss** the following statement with the class and **allow** the students to modify it, if desired: *All parents want the best for their kids, but sometimes it's hard for some parents who struggle with drugs, alcohol or violence, to even keep their kids safe.*

4. **▲ Review** the major points of this lesson:

- Some children may find it difficult to determine if they have been abused if they have been involved in an abusive situation for a long time. Being punched or yelled at may seem "not that bad" to some kids after enduring it for a long time.

- There are no good reasons that adults can offer to excuse child abuse. It is always the adults' job to keep the child safe.

- All parents probably want the best for their children, but problems such as alcoholism, violence and substance abuse can interfere with even providing basic safety.

- Every child and youth has basic human rights. These rights include being safe, nourished, sheltered, respected, permitted to freely think and feel, to be kept safe from sexual contact, and permitted to seek help if abuse occurs.

- If you think you are in an abusive situation, you must tell someone right away. You may want to tell a teacher, counselor, religious leader, family member or police officer. Keep telling until you are safe.

Every Child's Basic Human Rights Checklist

All families want the best for their children, but sometimes some families may find that due to drugs, alcohol, violence, or other problems, it is very difficult to even keep their children safe from abuse. When you are in the midst of a family that is struggling, it can be hard to figure out if you are being treated in ways that are dangerous to you. It may seem like "not that big a deal" that someone hits and kicks you, because that's what you're used to. This checklist was created to help you to figure out if you might be in danger. You can add items to it if you wish. It is not meant to be a complete listing, but it does name some of the human rights that you have as a child or youth-- that you may not have realized. If someone is violating these rights, you may be in danger-- even if it's happened a lot before. Place a ✓ if a right is being respected; place an X if not. Be sure to talk to your teacher or counselor about any X's, because you may really be in danger.

☐

You have the right to be
**PHYSICALLY SAFE FROM
KICKING, HITTING AND
OTHER VIOLENCE**


☐

You have the right to
**ADEQUATE FOOD AND
LIQUIDS EVERY DAY**


☐

You have the right to **SAFE
SHELTER**


☐

You have the right to be
treated with respect, **SAFE
FROM VERBAL, SEXUAL
OR PHYSICAL ABUSE**


☐

You have the right to
**THINK AND FEEL ANY
THOUGHTS AND
FEELINGS THAT OCCUR
TO YOU**


☐

You have the right to **SAY
"NO" TO SEXUAL
TOUCHING BY ANYONE**


☐

You have the right to **ASK
FOR HELP IF YOUR
RIGHTS HAVE BEEN
VIOLATED, OR IF YOU'RE
UNSURE IF YOUR RIGHTS
HAVE BEEN VIOLATED**



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